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Do Not Allow a Sorceress to Live

22:16 to 23:9

Do not allow a sorceress to live DIG: How do these laws relate to the Ten Commandments? To the sovereignty of God? To where you live? How are the Israelites different, or holy, compared to the pagans around them? On what basis is God entitled to the firstborn (see 12:24-30; 13:1-2 and 14-16)? How are justice and mercy related here?

REFLECT: Even though you live in a sinful world, how can you seek to live a more holy life this week? How do justice and mercy compare to the typical way you “do business” or “live and let live?” How can you show justice and mercy to fellow workers, students, customers, family, or strangers because of what God has done for you?

This is a very long section that has one common theme, evil practices or crimes against humanity. Social justice was as important to **God** in the TaNaKh as it is today. All these commandments were part of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah.

The seducer (22:16-17): This first group of commandments are an extension of the seventh commandment: **You shall not commit adultery (20:14)**. **After the cases of stealing property, Scripture proceeds to deal with stealing from the heart.** Unmarried and unbetrothed daughters in Israel were considered part of their father’s property; consequently the loss of a daughter’s virginity diminished her value and therefore compensation was due to the father.⁴²⁷ **If a man seduced a virgin who was not pledged to be married and slept with her, he had to pay the bride-price, and marry her.** The bride-price was a gift, often substantial (**Deuteronomy 22:28-29**), given by a prospective groom to the bride’s family as payment for her (see **Genesis 24:53**), a custom still followed in the Near East.⁴²⁸ **By the time of Jacob, the custom was that the bride price was supposed to be held in trust in the event it was needed to provide for the wife if she were abandoned or widowed** (see my commentary on **Genesis**, to see link click [Hq - Jacob Flees from Laban](#)). **If her father was so angry that he absolutely refused to give her to him, he still had to pay the bride-price for virgins (22:16-17)**. The specific amount of the payment is not stated. But in a parallel passage in **Deuteronomy 22:29**, it

was set at **fifty shekels of silver**. The demand for sexual purity and the demand to accord **a woman** with the dignity of marriage are both revelations of **God's** nature. They grant us insights into **His** character and remind us how **His** ways are higher than the ways of mankind.

*According to the Torah, if two people had sexual relations prior to betrothal, they were required to get married. The seriousness and severity by which the Torah regards the act of pre-marital intercourse ought to give us pause in the community of believers today. We live in an age where sex before marriage is not only commonplace, but appears to be the norm. **God** is not pleased with such activity. He is not honored by it. The message of abstinence must be proclaimed to a world that has believed the lie of Satan.⁴²⁹*



Sorcery (22:18): A sorceress was **not** allowed to live (22:18). **God** was very serious about idolatry (see **Deuteronomy 18:10, 14; First Samuel 28:9; Isaiah 47:12-14**) and witchcraft. According to the belief system in the ancient Near East, all true power in the world was magic. The god who displayed the greatest magical feats was considered the most powerful. Ancient people also used magic to manipulate the gods to their own advantage. Of course, **the Israelites** were greatly exposed to such practices in Egypt. In fact, the term for **sorcerers** is used in **7:11** of the magicians of Egypt who contended with Moses and Aaron. Magic was said to be evil by Hebrew law, because it attempted to triumph over **God's** will who is supreme over all the earth.

Bestiality (22:19): Anyone who had sexual relations with an animal was **put to death** (22:19). Bestiality (also see **Leviticus 18:23, 20:15-16; Deuteronomy 27:21**), although forbidden among **the children of Isra'el**, was common in both Ba'al and Canaanite worship. The practice seemed to be accepted in countries around the Eastern Mediterranean sea-coast. Hittite law was the only code in the area that discouraged against it. But even they did not condemn it in every case. Their laws said that people were exempt

from punishment if they had sex with a horse or a mule! **God's** word, on the other hand, allows no exceptions, because bestiality is simply an abomination (**Leviticus 18:23, 20:15-16**).

Idol worship (22:20): Whoever sacrificed to any god other than ADONAI was destroyed, because at that point he or she became *cherem*, or devoted to destruction (22:20). There are several examples of this kind of judgment in the TaNaKh (**Numbers 31:15-17; Deuteronomy 7:2, 26:16-17; Joshua 10:11 and 11:12; Judges 21:11; First Samuel 15:3 and 27:9-11; Jeremiah 25:9**). Probably the best-known example is that of Achan. The entire city of Jericho was declared *cherem*, or devoted to destruction by God Himself. That meant everything in Jericho wasn't to be touched. But when Achan kept a beautiful robe, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, the Israelites were unexpectedly defeated in their next battle of Ai because of his disobedience. Because Achan had touched that which was *cherem*, he became devoted to destruction. As a result, Joshua, together with all Isra'el, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor and stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them (**Joshua 6:18 to 7:28**). The same fate waited anyone who sacrificed to foreign gods.

*The fundamental principles laid down in the Ten Commandments, which are reflected in the Book of the Covenant, still apply to us today. They are our blueprint for living. That is, idolatry is wrong and an evil activity. We are not to participate in it.*⁴³⁰

Aliens in Egypt (22:21 and 23:9): Next, God protected the underprivileged and the needs of people low on the social scale are discussed (22:21-27). Grain was to be left behind for widows and orphans during the harvest (**Deuteronomy 24:19-21**), including the edges of fields (**Leviticus 19:9-10**). They were to be given special hospitality at feasts (**Deuteronomy 16:11-14**), they received a special tithe every third year (**Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 16:12-13**), and they were to be allowed to plant crops in others' fields during the sabbatical year (23:11-12). Therefore, God said: **Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt (22:21 and 23:9).**

We should understand the commandment in its simplest form - we are not to be unkind to **aliens**, nor are we to take advantage of **them**. Whether they are **alien** to us ethnically, nationally, regionally or religiously is not the issue. By treating **them** well, we emulate ADONAI. The Master Himself taught us to **become children of our Father in heaven**

by treating **aliens** with kindness (**Matthew 5:45-47**). However, this should not be misunderstood as a mandate to allow any and every **alien** full fellowship within our communities. In a society full of criminals, we do well to be on our guard. In practical measures, **the alien** who desires fellowship within a community of **Torah** should abide by the *halachah* of the community. His unwillingness to do so puts him in a place somewhat outside of the community, if not physically, then, most assuredly, practically.

Widows and orphans (22:22-24): Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan.

This is a revelation of **God's** character. Whereas the human tendency is to take advantage of the weak and the underprivileged, disregarding the helpless, **God is the Father of orphans and the Husband of widows. If you do and they cry out to Me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children orphans (22:22-24). The punishment was measure for measure. ADONAI is their defender and He demands that we take up their cause.** So much more than a dry collection of legal material, **Torah** is the very revelation of **God's** character!

Lending money to brothers and sisters (22:25-27): A Jew could not lend money to another Jew with interest. They could lend money to Gentiles and gain interest, but not Jews (Leviticus 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 15:7-11, 23:19; Nehemiah 5:7-12; Job 24:9; Proverbs 28:8; Ezekiel 18:13 and 22:12). Generosity in such matter was extended even further by **Yeshua (Luke 6:34-35). If you lend money to one of My people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender and charge him interest, even if one is lending at a lower rate than the standard interest rate, this is a transgression of Torah.** In addition, **If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate (22:25-27).** We learn from these mitzvot that **ADONAI** is generous and **His** hand is open. **He** cares for the downtrodden and destitute. Once again, the mitzvot of lending are revelations of **His** character.

Some churches often tend to be hesitant in dealing with the needy with whom they come in contact. Part of this certainly stems from a desire not be characterized as a "social-gospel" group of believers, that is, mainly interested in social causes. Many churches consequently bend over backwards to make certain their theology is right, and that they are diligently proclaiming the gospel. That is good, but it should not be at the expense of helping the indigent and needy. Good theology and social activism are not mutually exclusive, but should work together. A proper understanding of the gospel is that it has social

ramifications. **Israelites** during the Dispensation of Torah had no choice. They were commanded by **God** to care for **the alien, the widow, and the orphan**. We must do the same.⁴³¹

Next, **ADOANI** deals with commandments concerning those higher on the social scale (**22:28-31**). They deal with an expansion of the Third Commandment: **You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God (20:7)**. The basic theme is not using **God's** name thoughtlessly or lightly.

The ruler of your people (22:28): Throughout this parashah (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Af - Parashah**), the word **Elohim** carries a double connotation of "**God**" and "**judges**." That ambiguity is certainly present in this verse where we are warned: **Do not blaspheme God or treat the ruler of your people with contempt (22:28)**. The word **blaspheme** means *to take lightly*. The emphasis here is not to treat **God** in a light-hearted way. Two examples of **people** doing this are found in **Leviticus 24:10-13** and **First Kings 21:1-16**. The word **curse** means *to despise another*.

As **the Torah** court wields **God's Torah** and dispenses **His justice** on earth, **judges** on that court are regarded as **God's agents** on earth. Even when that **ruler** is worthy of being **cursed**, **he** is not to be reviled or **cursed**. Thus, **Paul** repented of having spoken in judgment against **the high priest** as soon as **he** realized who **he** was (see the commentary on **Acts Cr - Paul's Witness before the Great Sanhedrin**). In fact, **Paul** even quoted this passage of **Exodus** in his apology: **I didn't know, brothers, that he was the cohen hagadol; for it says in the Torah, "You are not to speak disparagingly of a ruler of your people" (Acts 23:5)**.

We learn from this that **ADONAI** invests **His** authority into the authorities placed over us. To despise the religious leaders that **Ha'Shem** has placed over us is, in some measure, an affront to **YHVH**. Hence the rabbinical blessing is as follows, "**Blessed are You ADONAI our God, King of the Universe, who has appointed of His knowledge to those who fear Him.**" The blessing for seeing a king is as follows, "**Blessed are You ADONAI our God, King of the Universe, who has given of His glory to flesh and blood.**"

Hastening to keep a mitzvah (22:29-30): The **Israelites** were reminded that **their** best belonged to **ADONAI**. **Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats (22:29a)**. Literally this verse says: *Do not hold back from your fullness and your dripping*. This probably meant *the firstfruits of the field and of the vine*. The message was clear. Don't hold back, give the best that you have to **the LORD**. The same held true for **the firstborn of Israel's sons**. **You must give Me the firstborn of yours sons**. We have already seen in

13:1-16 that the firstborn belonged to **God**, which meant that **they** must be sacrificed (of course that meant that they were to be redeemed, or substituted, with a lamb). **Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to Me on the eighth day (22:29b-30).** There is a clear parallel here with circumcision **on the eighth day (Gen 17:12)**, another type of dedication to **God**. This time likely represents a period of completeness after which the subject is adequately prepared to be given to **God**.

This commandment is a revelation of godliness as well. When there is good to do, we should not delay to do it. When we have a choice of fulfilling a mitzvah today or fulfilling a mitzvah tomorrow, we should always choose the most immediate path, for no one knows what a day brings. In the same way, this reveals to us that **God** hastens to do good for us! Though from our perspective it may seem that **He** waits and salvation is long in coming, in reality, **He** is not slow to answer prayer, but **He** does so immediately according to the best good that can be given to us.⁴³²

Torn meat (22:31): Animals killed by carnivorous **beasts** were **not** to be eaten by **Isra'el**, because eating meat torn by **wild beasts** made them unclean (**Leviticus 17:15** and **22:8**). **You are to be My holy people.** One of the signs of being a people who have been set apart was obeying strict dietary commandment. **So do not eat the meat of an animal torn** (Hebrew: *traif*) **by wild beasts. Meat** that is **torn** or died on its own is regarded as non-kosher and unclean, even if the animal itself is a clean animal. **Throw it to the dogs (22:31, also see Leviticus 7:24).** This mitzvah is also a revelation of the character of **God**. **He** states that we are not to **eat the meat of a torn animal** because we are to be "People of holiness." According to human logic, the difference between eating a hamburger made from a cow that slaughtered and bled has nothing to do with holiness. But **God's** ways are higher than ours, which is why we need revelation in the first place. According to **ADONAI**, it is a matter of holiness, an issue of separation.⁴³³

*Not only does this section expound the Third Commandment, but it also reflects the teaching of the Fifth Commandment. It demands of us that we honor those in authority over us, whether it is **God** or man. It forbids us to despise them. When Paul stood before the Sanhedrin, he was seen rebuking one of the priests. After he was told that the priest was the high priest, Paul backs off by saying: **Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written, "Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people" (Acts 23:4-5).**⁴³⁴ We also need to honor those in authority over us (**Romans 13:1-7**).*

Legal justice (23:1-8): The final cycle of mitzvot pertaining to social responsibility focused

on matters of legal justice. Just as we have learned that the judicial mitzvot reflect directly upon **ADONAI, His** character and **His person**, so too injustice perpetrated by a **Torah** court is a direct blasphemy of **YHVH Himself**. Thus, Torah brings serious admonitions to the judicial process, demanding care when hearing witnesses give testimony, caution against being swayed by majority sentiment, warning against leniency toward a person because they are poor or underprivileged, warning against perversion of justice, warning against executing the innocent and the righteous, warning against accepting bribes and warning against denying justice to an **alien**.

Most of the commands that follow are expansions of the ninth commandment: **You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16)**. Therefore, **do not spread false reports in a court of law**. No one was supposed to act in collusion with an evil person who was attempting to avoid the rules of justice. **Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness (23:1)**. Violations of the basic principles found here are also written in **Deuteronomy 22:13-19** and **Proverbs 25:21**.

Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. Much heartache in life could be avoided by obeying this commandment. Usually, **the crowd** isn't bent on doing much else! We should only **follow** truth and justice. **When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit** if he is in the wrong (23:2-3). In other words, **he** shouldn't be able to get away with a crime just because **he** is **poor (Leviticus 19:15)**.

*Part of the teaching of this section of the Torah was, that believers were **not** to **follow the crowd** when **the crowd** was determined to do evil. Believers are also to stand against mob rule and against the will of the majority when it is **wrong**. But someone may say, "I am in the minority." Yes, but praying people are in the minority. People who love **God's** Word are in the minority. Honoring **God's** day in **His** house is an exercise for the minority. But do not be discouraged! For we serve a conquering **King** who leads the minority!"⁴³⁵*

This section continued with the basic idea that justice was to prevail. And that justice was to be unprejudiced, that is, to apply to all people in **Isra'el**. **If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him**. In this regard, the enemy is treated like a friend or neighbor (**Proverbs 25:21**).⁴³⁶ **If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there. Be sure you help him with it (23:4-5)**. The word **enemy's** and **someone who hates you**, probably means *a legal adversary*. **The Israelites** were to be kind even to **the animal** of someone with whom **they** had a legal dispute. A plain reading of these verses - affirmed by

the Master's instruction to **love you enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44)** - reveals to us a piece of true godliness. It is a revelation of **YHVH** that would never occur to us naturally. Such a mitzvot teaches us about **God's** mercy and compassion. The Torah speaks in human language. When we study the mitzvot of helping your **enemy** get **his donkey** up onto its feet, we have learned a little bit about **ADONAI**.⁴³⁷

Denying **justice to the poor**, giving false testimony in court, and accepting bribes were common problems in the ancient world. Therefore, **God** commanded **the Israelites**, "**Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits**" (23:6). This is the other side of the coin of 23:3. There, it forbids favoring them in court; here, it prohibits any form of bias against them for being **poor**. Have **nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death (23:7a)**. Judges needed to be very careful not to **put an innocent person to death**. And if that meant that occasionally a criminal might go unpunished, there was no need to despair, because **God** would eventually judge them **Himself**. He said: **For I will not acquit the guilty (23:7b)**.

ADONAI commanded: **Do not accept a bribe** under any circumstances, **for a bribe blinds those who see and twists or perverts the words of the righteous (23:8)**. Someone who was blinded and perverted to justice was, and still is today, a very dangerous person. Taking a **bribe** became a symbol of individual corruption for the Jews. **A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice (Proverbs 17:23; also see Deuteronomy 10:17; First Samuel 8:3; Second Chronicles 19:7 and Psalm 15:5)**.

Each of these mitzvah of legal justice reveals the character of **ADONAI** as a **God** of justice. The Psalmist declares: **Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne (Psalm 89:14)**. **YHVH** is a just judge. No false testimony can stand before **Him**. **He** cannot be bribed; **He** cannot be bought. **He** will not be swayed by sentiment, nor will **He** condemn the innocent with the guilty. In **Abraham's** words: **Far be it from You to do such a thing - to kill the righteous along with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shouldn't the Judge of all the earth do what is just (Genesis 18:25)?**.⁴³⁸